

29th March, 1926.

TO THE BRACKLEY RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL.

GENTLEMEN,

I beg to present my Thirty-third Annual Report of the sanitary condition of my district, and in doing so I must remark that it contains (by instruction of the Ministry of Health) many features which will appear to yourselves superogatory, features which are so well known to us that they might well be taken for granted, but which convey necessary information to one who knows nothing whatever of the natural conditions and circumstances of the district. By the direction of the Ministry such a report is to be made every five years and will be called a "Survey Report."

Vital Statistics.

The Brackley Rural District is situated in the South East corner of Northamptonshire, and is bordered on the South by the County of Oxford (Bicester Rural District) and passing East and North is contiguous to Buckingham Rural District, the Towcester Rural District, the Daventry Rural District, the Middleton Cheney Rural District, and the Banbury Urban and Rural Districts. The population of the district at the census of 1911 was 7,207; the total area amounts to 42,440 acres. It has been estimated for the purpose of computing the birth and death rates in 1925 at 6,556. The number of deaths was 100, a rate of 15.2 per 1,000; births 107, a rate of 16.3 per 1,000. The deaths of infants under one year amounted to 5, an infantile death rate of 46 per 1,000 births.

The district is wholly agricultural and Rural, mainly arable land in the south and west, and largely grass in the north. It contains no large towns, though the Urban District of Brackley lies at its extreme S.W. angle. The largest village is that of King's Sutton, where a considerable proportion of the inhabitants were occupied in the iron stone works in the neighbourhood; these are now closed down owing to foreign competition, and the population is now engaged entirely in agriculture. There can be said to be no pursuits which have any special adverse influences on the health and habits of the inhabitants. The people are fairly well-to-do at the present time, and the number in receipt of Poor Law Relief is very much less than when I was appointed years ago. This, of course, has been largely influenced by the Old Age Pensions and the National Insurance Act. There are, however, many aged poor who, although they may be able to exist, are still without proper care and attention. There is a rooted disinclination to enter the "Home." This Institution is still regarded as the "Workhouse." I can personally testify to the fact that this reluctance to end their days in the "Home" is largely sentimental, for I have seen many there whom I have known for many years in difficult and often squalid circumstances, looking well and cheerful, and appearing—once accustomed to the environment—perfectly happy and comfortable.

Water Supply.

The water supply of the district is derived entirely from shallow wells, and except in exceptionally dry summers has always proved adequate. The continued absence of water-borne disease in the district is sufficient evidence of its quality. The wells, are of course, naturally liable to pollution, but efforts during late years to reduce this to minimum by removing nuisances, providing them with suitable covering and raising the heads above the ground level, appear to have been satisfactory. At all events, enteric fever and allied diseases are almost unknown in the district.

Pollution of Streams

The brooks and small streams drain either into the Ouse, which rises in the parish of Farthinghoe, or into the Cherwell which runs into the Banbury Urban District. I have never known any pollution of the former in this district, but there was some trouble at Culworth owing to pollution of the latter by the village drains, the result of a scheme which was carried out many years ago in spite of my strenuous opposition, the origin of the trouble being the drainage of a large house into the quite unsuitable village drain, which was never intended for the purpose, though it was contended that once having been permitted it could not be diverted. Every effort has been made by the introduction of settling tanks and filter beds to obviate the results of this mistake, and the scheme is now working satisfactorily as are also the other village schemes in the district. I think the only drainage difficulty now to be overcome is that at King's Sutton and as a result of pressure brought by the Thames Conservancy in consequence of the undoubted pollution of the river Cherwell this undertaking has at last received serious consideration and plans are being prepared. I made a special report after consultation with the County Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Paget and the recommendations promptly made were accepted by the Parish Council at King's Sutton. There has been some delay owing to the difficulty of obtaining the most suitable site for the works but this will be overcome. The scheme involves pumping the sewage as parts of the district are below the level of the Cherwell. There are very few water closets in the district, and such as there are are in the larger residential houses. These are all provided with cesspools, which are, in their own interests, carefully attended to by owners and occupiers, and have never in my recollection, given rise to any trouble. Practically the midden is the universal medium for the disposal of sewage, and seldom gives rise to nuisance. They are regularly emptied by the cottagers, and their contents dug into their gardens. The use of earth closets and pail has always been advocated, but the system is not fool-proof and in dirty and negligent hands gives rise to greater nuisances than the midden, which has always worked very well in a rural district if the cottagers are well looked after and made to attend to them. The Sanitary Inspector keeps a constant watchful eye on these matters.

Schools

The Sanitary Condition of the Public Elementary Schools is satisfactory and no complaints of any insanitary conditions have been received. Any children suffering from infectious disease are isolated, and members of the family are also excluded. I have never seen any advantage in closing schools for such diseases as mumps, whooping cough and measles, where the attendance has fallen to such an extent as to affect the "grant." I have tried on one or two occasions, on the first appearance of such a disease, to prevent extension by closing them, but the action has never proved effectual. I invariably refuse to advise the Authority to order the closing of a school because the attendance has fallen, the inference being that the remaining scholars are immune as the result of a previous attack, and there appears no good reason why their education should be interfered with. If financial difficulties arise as the effect of the operation of the Education Authorities' "Code," it would seem reasonable that this should be altered rather than that another Authority should be asked to help out of a difficulty on entirely different (and false) grounds. However, the School Medical Officers appear to come to their assistance in these cases by closing the schools, though on what grounds I am unable to say.

Lodging Houses.
Workshops.

There are no houses let in lodgings and no offensive trades, and such premises as exist which come under the Workshops regulations do so in the letter rather than the spirit.

Nursing

Nearly every part of the district can now command the services of a Nurse. These are attached to district associations in connection with the County Nursing Association. These nurses practise also as midwives and the risks of the diseases and accidents of child birth are much diminished. No case of Puerperal fever has occurred during the year.

Bakehouses,
Slaughter Houses,
Cowsheds, Isolation
Hospital.

The Bakehouses, Slaughter-houses and Cowsheds have all been regularly inspected and are now all in order and clean. In all cases after Infectious disease the premises have been disinfected. There is no Isolation Hospital in the district. The question of provision has frequently been discussed, but the difficulties have never been overcome. After a very long experience, I have come to the conclusion that small local Hospitals must be uneconomical. In such a district as this the Establishment charges would be very considerable, and its use only quite occasional. The infectious diseases dealt with are preponderantly those of childhood, and these are isolated as far as possible at home, and I have very seldom observed extension of disease outside the premises notified.

Notifiable Diseases.

Only 17 cases of notifiable diseases were registered during the year, of which there were of—

Enteric Fever	...	...	...	1
Scarlet Fever	...	...	...	11
Erysipelas	...	..	...	1
Pneumonia	...	...	..	4

The case of Enteric Fever occurred at Moreton Pinkney and investigation revealed the fact that the patient had been in attendance on a case of illness at a farmhouse near which was described as "narrowly having escaped Typhoid Fever." The Sanitary arrangements here were carefully enquired into and the midden disinfected and emptied. The water supply was analysed and found satisfactory and no further trouble was experienced but no light could be thrown on the origin of that particular case. The attendance of an ignorant and unskilled person on a case of Enteric Fever is invariably attended by disaster. In the hands of a person competent to deal with it there is absolutely no danger of extension from the case under observation. The cases of Scarlet Fever were of the usual mild character noticed of late years; no death occurred from this disease, nor as the result of measles. No case of diphtheria was notified, but two or three suspicious throats were examined bacteriologically, but the result was negative. You still continue to supply antitoxin and bacteriological examinations in necessitous cases, and I keep a supply of serum for distribution in emergency.

The Cases of tuberculosis notified were :—

Pulmonary (male 0, female 4)	...	...	...	4
Non-pulmonary	...	...	...	none

Ophthalmia
neonatorum

No case of ophthalmia neonatorum was notified. The prevalence of this trouble was always small in rural districts, and since the introduction of registration of midwives and the consequent education and control of persons attending in childbirth the disease is practically negligible.

Notification of
Tuberculosis

The notification of cases of tuberculosis appears to be efficient. No unnotified death occurred.

Causes of Sickness

There have been no specially remarkable causes of sickness during the year amongst adults. The usual epidemics of childhood's diseases have appeared from time to time in all parts of the district, and schools have been closed for lack of attendance, but it has not been necessary for me to advise the Authority to close any school in the interests of the public health.

Food

The food supplied to the district has not been called in question regarding the quality, and no action has been called for regarding unwholesome food. The milk supply is, of course provided locally, and is fairly adequate; only in a few cases is there any difficulty, where this necessity is sent away to large centres. There have been no complaints from these as to its quality. I have already referred to the Bakehouses, Slaughter-houses and Cowsheds, and these and other places where food is stored and prepared have been overlooked. There is no public abattoir in the district, but the inspector makes inspections of the slaughter-houses at frequent intervals without previous notice. No carcasses have been required to be condemned for tuberculosis. No action has been required under the "Sale of Food and Drugs Acts."

Sanitary
Administration.

The Sanitary administration of the district is carried out by a part-time Medical Officer of Health and one Sanitary Inspector, who devotes the whole of his time to his duties. The salary of the Inspector has been augmented, but application for the War bonus recommended by the Local Government Board was refused to both officers. The salary of the M.O.H. has not been raised.

Vaccination

I have not been called upon in my capacity of Medical Officer of Health to perform any vaccinations under the Public Health (Small Pox Prevention) Regulations, 1917. The district is well supplied with facilities for vaccination and re-vaccination.

Public Institutions

There are no large public Institutions within the district where free medical advice and attention can be obtained: those requiring such go to the County Infirmaries at Northampton or Oxford. There is a Cottage Hospital at Brackley, which does excellent work in the district. Emergency cases, which it would often be difficult to remove to either of the two first-named Institutions, are frequently well dealt with there.

Overcrowding.

No cases of over-crowding have been dealt with nor reported.

The following is a summary of the work of the year. All defects have been remedied without resorting to legal proceedings:—

DWELLING HOUSES.				
Inspections made during the year 1920	...	...	...	198
Number of Cottages reported unfit for habitation	...	...	...	5
Number of Cottages voluntarily closed	...	...	...	2
Cottages in which defects were remedied to escape closing orders	...	...	...	16
Houses cleansed throughout	...	...	...	47
Roofs repaired or renewed	...	...	...	31
New Cottages built	...	...	...	2
New closets provided	...	...	...	7
Dilapidated closets repaired	...	...	...	11
Spoutings repaired or renewed	...	...	...	29
New yard pavings	...	...	...	11
New coverings to wells	...	...	...	4
DRAINAGE, ETC.				
Obstructed drains opened and cleaned	...	...	...	42
Glazed earthenware gullies fixed	...	...	...	27
Houses connected to sewers	...	...	...	9
Sewer interceptors fixed	...	...	...	3
Disconnecting and Inspection chamber	...	...	...	9
Cesspools cleansed	...	...	...	19
New house drains provided	...	...	...	16
MISCELLANEOUS.				
Slaughter-houses lime-washed	...	...	...	14
Bakehouses	...	...	...	11
Cowsheds and dairies	...	...	...	98
Accumulations of manure removed	...	...	...	3
Pigstyes condemned	...	...	...	8

I am, Gentlemen,

Your Obedient Servant,

(Signed) G. Nicholson Stathers,

D.P.H. CAMB.,

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH.

